

REACHING FOR THE TOP

Profiles of Success



Fran Barker

Pre-Apprenticeship Graduate
West Virginia Women Work | Robert C. Byrd Institute

Fran Barker was having a lousy day. She was not satisfied with her job in customer service in the restaurant industry. She had erratic hours and a non-guaranteed pay structure, and her husband had recently become disabled. Because of night hours, she felt she had missed out on raising her three teenage boys and that it was time for a career change.

When the West Virginia Women Work Pre-Apprenticeship Program popped up on an employment search website, Fran thought, "I need this. I can do this!" So at age 37, she applied for the program and was accepted. The program included flexible online workforce education from Tooling U-SME and hands-on lab work at the Robert C. Byrd Institute (RCBI) machine shop. "It was really hard juggling my three boys and my husband's needs," said Fran. "Having the flexibility to work on my Tooling U-SME online classes at home helped a lot."

Fran focused on CNC machining but also learned blueprint reading, manual lathe and mill work, and how to make parts. Her favorite class project was building a nut and a bolt, including the threading. During a class competition, Fran learned the value of teamwork, and was determined to meet her goals. She had fallen in love with manufacturing and couldn't wait to get a job.

Near the end of the program, Fran applied to a local manufacturer, Special Metals, and was told about an exam she would need to take. She immediately went to her Tooling U-SME classes and previewed everything she would need for the exam, which she aced. It wasn't long before Fran was fully employed, making close to \$16 per hour with additional overtime, full health benefits, a 401K,

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life insurance, vacation pay and annual free equipment for her position. She also has the opportunity to grow, and loves learning everything the company has to offer. Two departments are already vying for her to work with them. In short, her life has changed for the better.

"One year ago, I never thought I could do any of this," said Fran. "I learned that if I put my mind to it, I can accomplish it. One foot in front of the other—don't be intimidated. Give yourself a pep talk." She is now recommending this program to all of her previous restaurant associates, telling them, "If you want a serious career change, try this! It is challenging and equally rewarding."

Learn more about how to "Grow your own Workforce" by partnering with Tooling U-SME for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.

